



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

R3 Regional Office

333 Broadway SE
Albuquerque, NM 87102
FAX (505) 842-3800
V/TTY (505) 842-3292

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Rob Baracker
Regional Director
Bureau of Indian Affairs
Southwest Regional Office
P.O. Box 26567
Albuquerque, NM 87125

Dear Mr. Baracker:

On July 15, David Conklin of our staff met with Randy Zimmer and Roger Jensen (Jicarilla Agency) to evaluate the proposed Fence Line North dwarf mistletoe control project on the Jicarilla Apache Indian Reservation. This letter describes the project area and the treatment proposed by the Jicarilla Agency. Mention is also made of two recently completed projects that were briefly examined on this day.

Fence Line North Project. This FY 2004 project would involve non-commercial felling of mistletoe-infected and excess trees in two cutting units on Pounds Mesa totaling 150 acres. Unit 22 (124 acres) and Unit 24 (26 acres) are both predominantly ponderosa pine, with minor amounts of Douglas-fir and Rocky Mt. Juniper. Stands are more or less two-storied, with scattered mature overstories and understories of small poles and saplings. Recent inventories indicate stocking of approximately 300 trees per acre in Unit 22 and about 200 trees per acre in the smaller Unit 24.

Pine dwarf mistletoe (*Arceuthobium vaginatum* subsp. *cryptopodum*) is patchy in distribution and of moderate intensity overall in both units. In Unit 22, the parasite occurs primarily on the west and east facing slopes; relatively little infestation was observed on the mesa top itself. In Unit 24, disease centers appeared to be randomly distributed throughout. Inventories indicate current infection rates of about 25 percent of stems in Unit 22 and about 40 percent in Unit 24.

Both units were commercially harvested in 1997 and 1998 under a (mostly) single-tree selection prescription. Three 2- to 3-acre patch clear-cuts were made on the west-facing slope of Unit 22 in areas with severe dwarf mistletoe infestation. This sale removed most of the mistletoe-infected overstory trees in both units.

The proposal calls for thinning to an average spacing of 20 to 22 feet (90 to 100 trees/acre). Most visibly infected trees would be removed, although some lightly infected dominant and codominant trees will be retained to supplement stocking. Lightly infected poles (5 to 9" dbh) of good form and vigor can make acceptable leave trees, and should be available for harvest at the next commercial entry. A few carefully selected leave trees may be pruned to remove infections in the lower crown. Post-treatment basal area will average 40 to 50 ft²/acre.



As a precaution during this extended drought, the thinning crew will buck the boles of felled trees into five-foot lengths. This will make the material easier to move during any fire fighting activities, and will hasten drying, reducing the length of time it is suitable habitat for *Ips* bark beetles. To further reduce the potential for an *Ips* outbreak, we recommend conducting the treatment between late July and December.

Fence Line South (FY 2003) and Cabin Finger (FY 2002) Projects. Treatment of the adjacent Fence Line South units was nearly complete at the time of this visit. As in past projects, it appeared that the Tribal thinning crew had done an excellent job selecting leave trees. As expected, some evidence of *Ips* bark beetles was observed in the fresh thinning slash; however, it did not appear that a large population was developing. Last year's Cabin Finger Project, also nearby on Pounds Mesa, has experienced very minimal mortality among leave trees, despite the drought and the slash generated in the late spring and early summer. Continued monitoring of *Ips* populations is still recommended within ongoing and recent project areas at Jicarilla.

Conclusions. The proposed Fence Line North project is biologically sound and should, throughout the next 20-year cutting: 1) reduce growth loss and mortality from dwarf mistletoe; 2) reduce potential losses from bark beetles — primarily western and mountain pine beetles; and 3) increase growth on selected crop trees. We again commend the Jicarilla Agency and the Jicarilla Tribe for their excellent project proposal and their continued commitment to forest health.

Sincerely,

/s/ David A. Conklin (for)
DEBRA ALLEN-REID
New Mexico Zone Leader,
Forest Health

cc: Leonard Lucero/R3/USDAFS, Douglas L Parker/R3/USDAFS, John Anhold/R3/USDAFS

Roger Jensen, Jicarilla Agency, BIA, Branch of Forestry, Dulce, NM 87528
Randy Zimmer, Jicarilla Agency, BIA, Branch of Forestry, Dulce, NM 87528
Bev Schwab, Southwest Regional Office, BIA, P.O. Box 26567, Albuquerque, NM 87125-6567